

2. The antinomies of identity politics: neoliberalism, race and political participation in Colombia

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The focus of this research is what might be thought of as Colombia's official culture of anti-racism, a term that seems decidedly out of place in a country where racism continues to be such an obvious everyday reality. Yet in some ways it is an apposite categorisation. After all, Colombia is a country in which the constitutional recognition of the rights of Afrocolombian and indigenous communities has led to nearly a third of the national territory being assigned to the jurisdiction of the traditional authorities of these minority groups (Paschel, 2016b, p. 57). An anti-discrimination law focusing particularly on racism, passed in 2011, the International Year of Afrodescendants, allows for the imprisonment of offenders for up to three years. State and municipal institutions have programmes emphasising the need for 'inclusion', a rather nebulous term, to be sure, but nonetheless one which implies the need to recognise the rights of minorities and promote their representation in public life. The *manuales de convivencia* that exist in all of Colombia's schools, both public and private, contain sections promoting tolerance and respect for ethnic or racial minorities. In short, the political and juridical foundations of the Colombian state enshrine the principle of equal rights and equal status of minority groups in a pluriethnic and multicultural state.

This framework has been shored up by other forms of official recognition. The designation of 21 May as the day of *afrocolombianidad*, albeit a rather weak move in a country where most days seem to have some profession or group attached to them, has been followed by official anti-racist programmes such as the Hora contra el racismo [Hour against Racism] and Ponga la cara al racismo [Face up to Racism], which have in turn been framed within the Afro Decade campaign launched by the ministry of the interior as part of a UN initiative. With its slogan 'Recognition, Justice and Development 2015–24', the programme aims at 'making visible the rights of Afrocolombians', a form of words that reworks the longstanding complaint about Afrocolombians' lack of visibility on the national stage in order to focus on the need to respect the rights they have already been afforded under the constitution and subsequent legislation.

N. Morgan, 'The antinomies of identity politics: neoliberalism, race and political participation in Colombia', in P. Wade, J. Scorer and I. Aguiló (eds.), *Cultures of Anti-Racism in Latin America and the Caribbean* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2019), pp. 25–47. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

The national media appear to have accepted and amplified these measures. Indeed, for some time now, casual everyday racism has been increasingly subject to critique in the public space created by the media. In 2012, Bogotá city councillor Jorge Durán Silva was forced into a humiliating apology after describing a rowdy meeting as a 'blacks' tea party', while in 2015, Caracol TV, one of Colombia's two main private TV channels was forced to retire the polemical blackface character, Soldado Micolta, played by mestizo comedian Roberto Lozano, from the popular comedy show *Sábados Felices*, after a complaint by the activist group Chao Racismo.

Most recently, Maurice Armitage, the mayor of Cali, a city with a large Afrocolombian population, found himself at the centre of a media storm for the racist tenor of comments made during an interview with TV news programme CM&, in which he linked football violence to the civic strike in the nearby port of Buenaventura, on the overwhelmingly black Pacific coast. His claim that Cali was 'an explosive city' where 'we have a million blacks and live with them in peace, we love them a lot but we have to be careful with this kind of violence', as a prime example of the 'othering' of the black population, while associating it unequivocally with violence (*El Espectador*, 2017). What made this statement even more embarrassing was that Ray Charrupí, president of Chao Racismo, had been taken on as a consultant by Armitage in an attempt to deal with the city's endemic racism, which has received increasing media attention in recent years. To make matters still worse, Armitage's administration had only just denounced *caleño* journalist Daniel Vivas's racist Twitter feed denigrating the annual Petronio Álvarez festival celebrating music from the Pacific littoral. 'What's that smell of shit?', tweeted Vivas. 'Ah, yes, the Petronio Álvarez has started' (Aldía, 2017). The tweet was promptly deleted, but a deluge of outrage ensued. Vivas's equally racist blog was removed by *El Tiempo* (2017), Colombia's main daily, after complaints by readers, leading to the editorial team issuing a statement noting that 'this newspaper reiterates its respect and admiration for the country's cultural traditions, which enhance its ethnic diversity and construct a pluralist and democratic identity'.

The public outcry, steered and editorialised by the media, exemplifies the everyday dynamics of an official or mainstream anti-racism, an assemblage of institutional arrangements and discourses, which has found an echo in the mainstream networks of cultural exchange. The political consequences of this nexus, whose emergence is the fruit of a long and arduous struggle by anti-racist activists within the Afrocolombian and indigenous population, as well as the adoption of anti-racist discourses by international institutions such as the World Bank, have been significant since its establishment through the constitution of 1991. Most strikingly, the disavowal of racism, once the default position of national institutions, has been replaced by an acceptance of its prevalence, alongside a blanket condemnation of all discriminatory practices.

Of course, not only do these examples themselves reveal the casual racism that continues to disfigure everyday life in Colombia but even at the moment of condemnation both the media and institutions frequently reproduce racist tropes. Institutions, after all, are made up of people, many of whom unreflectingly share commonly held racist assumptions. At the very least, stereotypical ways of thinking about race continue to make their appearance in public campaigns, exemplified by an anti-racist campaign organised in 2015 by the local administration in Bogotá. It showed the figure of an indigenous woman anchored by the slogan 'Don't discriminate, I'm in your blood', in the process reproducing a longstanding metaphor about the biological foundations of identity. Furthermore, as is so often the case, the fine intentions of official documents may exist in the statute books without being put into practice in everyday life. Between 2012 and 2016, for example, only one person was convicted under the anti-discrimination law, although 873 cases were brought. Most of the material pertaining to the Afro Decade campaign on the ministry of the interior's website is cut and pasted from UN documents, as the site itself acknowledges. When it comes to the specific contribution of the state to this process, we are simply informed that the Santos administration's development plan, based on the three pillars of peace, equity and education, will 'obviously' help all Colombians, since it has a multi-ethnic focus (DACN, 2015). In fact, it seems that the relationship between institutions and the ethnic minority population is often characterised by co-option and tokenism, as Afrocolombians and indigenous people remain underrepresented in Congress. Meanwhile those who have taken over ministerial portfolios have done so in areas that fit existing stereotypes about ethnic minorities, such as culture and the environment. Most importantly, by every available indicator these communities live shorter and more impoverished lives, receive worse public services, are offered poorer quality education and health care, and have provided a disproportionate number of victims of the violent encounters that have come to be known simply as the armed conflict.

The chasm between these social realities and the official adoption of an explicitly anti-racist stance invites us to explore the latter's role in the reproduction and contestation of power in one of the most unequal states in the most unequal region of the world. After all, the New Granadan social order, whose legacy continues to haunt contemporary Colombia, was founded on a hierarchy of difference that is now understood through the lens of race and ethnicity. For all that Malcolm Deas (1997, p. 358) notes that mid 19th century Colombia was 'in many respects [...] a more mobile, freer, less caste-bound, less deferential, more democratic society than its neighbours', the fact remains that the abject poverty that marked the lives of most of the million inhabitants of Nueva Granada at the time of independence, in stark contrast to the leisured classes, had not been alleviated at the turn of the 20th century. Colombia, its

population then four million, remained one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the hemisphere. In spite of the economic lift-off of the 1920s and 30s, and the emergence of a middle class as a result of the increasing prosperity of the country from mid-century on, this fundamental inequality has not been overcome in two hundred years of republican history. While there was a modest redistribution of resources between the 1960s and the early 1980s, the advent of neoliberal economic policies put paid to Colombia's nascent welfare state in the 90s. World Bank figures for 2014 suggested Colombia had a GINI of over 53, rising to a staggering 86 in rural areas, putting it ahead of Brazil, Paraguay and Honduras in terms of inequality (World Bank, 2014; UNDP, 2011). Other estimates vary but, by any measure, Colombia's disparities in income and access to resources remain extraordinarily large.

Given that anti-racism sets out to combat the effects of particular historic forms of inequality, to talk about this struggle without considering the broader picture of inequality in the country is to miss an important point, as if the social order experienced by the mestizo majority were somehow fundamentally democratic and just. Furthermore, the prejudices associated with racism are not confined to attitudes to those who are identified as part of the black and indigenous populations, but permeate society as a whole. Indigenous-looking and dark-skinned mestizos still experience discrimination, and the imbrication in the social imaginary of notions of race and class continues to legitimise both racism and elitism. Combatting racism, in other words, is not simply a matter of integrating previously marginalised populations into a prevailing democratic order, but of challenging the sedimented history of inequality that continues to structure the contemporary political scene. In this respect, Paschel (2016a, p. 50) is right to note that anti-racist mobilisation may 'take multiple forms', singling out intellectuals, political leaders and activists like the Afrocolombian Rafael Serra and the Afrocolombian Diego Luis Córdoba, 'who organized around regional identity and under a socialist platform'.

This is not to say that struggles over ethnicity should be abandoned in favour of class. On the contrary, my contention is that notions of race and class cannot properly be separated in the Colombian context. The left's failure to take ethnicity properly into account revealed a political blind spot, as revolutionary movements took for granted a vision of the mestizo nation that ignored the specificity of racial discrimination. All forms of politics are in a sense forms of identity politics, in that, rather than representing stable pre-constituted social phenomena, identities are articulated, claimed, and further developed through conflict. However, just as in the case of class, an emphasis on ethnicity to the exclusion of other factors is likely to obscure other patterns of dominance and subordination. In what follows, therefore, I focus on the case of Afrocolombians in order to consider the influence of the official recognition and condemnation of discrimination on recent political struggles in Colombia. In particular, the questions of the role current institutional arrangements envisage within the

political system for ethnic minorities, of how these groups are constituted as political subjects, and how their relationship not only with the state but with other social actors has developed since 1991, are of crucial importance in contemporary political conflicts. The case studies that make up the second part of this chapter therefore, centre on how *afrocolombianidad* is constructed as a political identity in specific contexts, and in particular considers its role in attempts to construct a counterhegemonic movement capable of challenging the deep-seated inequalities that continue to shape everyday life.

Gramscian hegemony and identity politics

The framing of these questions places them within the general idiom of Gramscian hegemony theory, which will provide the overarching conceptual point of reference here, though it will not be taken as a precise model to be followed. As has often been pointed out, Gramsci's approach was very much an ad hoc one, and the many insights that can be gleaned from the hundreds of pages of notes written in Mussolini's jails do not represent a complete conceptual system. What Gramscian thinking does allow, however, is an approach that emphasises the multiplicity of factors through which modern societies have come to be, as Hall (1980) put it, structured in dominance, and the heterogeneous nature of both elite and subaltern groups, who forge their identities through struggle. It emphasises the importance of violence in the reproduction of power, a point often underplayed in understandings of Gramsci that focus on the role of consent, but which has a particular resonance in the Colombian context. It also concerns itself with the cultural dimension of power, whose importance is evident in the way social relationships become naturalised through forms of 'common sense' that contain the seeds of resistance, or as Gramsci (1971, p. 627) puts it, 'prejudices from all past phases of history ... and intuitions of a future philosophy'. In the process, it captures the fragmented, incomplete, and often contradictory nature of social being.

Colombia offers an intriguing case study for hegemony theory and the role of identity politics. Some might claim that the country's turbulent history is proof of a failure of hegemony, and therefore of the state's lack of legitimacy. Yet the stability of the country's social structure, which has been capable of tolerating relatively high levels of political violence, shows that in spite of the problems of legitimacy faced by the state, the reproduction of power and privilege has nonetheless been secured. The Gramscian concept that best captures, perhaps, Colombian politics over the turn of the century is 'passive revolution' (p. 288). This term refers to periods in which the alliance of groups that dominates a given polity faces a crisis. A passive revolution provides a temporary fix for the crisis by initiating change without substantially threatening the interests of the alliance of groups that exerts leadership in a particular social formation. In the Colombian case, the crisis was posed by the need to dismantle the last vestiges

of the import substitution model, already largely abandoned in the 80s, and reposition the Colombian economy within corporate globalisation. The fix came through the promotion of extractive industry, industrial agribusiness, and the provision of services, particularly in the financial sector. In short, the passive revolution under way since the late 80s has effected a significant transformation of the local political economy without confronting the problem of inequality. The current negotiated surrender of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) can be thought of as a part of this ongoing process, offering as it does enormous opportunities for a deepening of a neoliberal development model while posing real perils for popular movements.

This notion also affords insights into the constitution of 1991, which is seen as a milestone for its construction of a political and legal framework that institutionalises a form of multiculturalism, partly in terms of recognition and partly in terms of redistribution (Fraser, 1995). In spite of its limitations and ambiguities, it is generally interpreted as a progressive document that seeks to effect a shift in the status of historically excluded groups. Over the last decade a sector of the Colombian political class, essentially those groups supporting ex-president Alvaro Uribe, has been at war with a constitutional settlement perceived as too liberal, too permissive and too democratic. However, the constitution has long been the object of vigorous attacks from the left, who have criticised it as a neoliberalising document that paved the way for the privatisation of parts of the Colombian state, in a process described by Harvey (2004) as accumulation through dispossession. In the words of Mejía (2007, p. 236, my translation), 'Colombia's elites managed [...] through the imposition of a neoliberal model of development, to constitutionalise lies and cloak their historic strategy of domination in the seductive clothing of the social state of law and participatory democracy'.

The expansion of participatory programmes and the recognition of Afrocolombian and indigenous rights, therefore, need to be understood in the context of the neoliberalisation of the economy and the refusal of traditional elites to relinquish their privileges. This restructuring was not simply an elite conspiracy, imposed from above, but part of a series of struggles that have shaped a political scene which is not exactly what any group would have chosen, but which consistently favours the interests of a dominant bloc. As Mejía (2007, p. 236) notes, social democratic, multicultural, and neoliberal currents all coexist within the final document, the product of negotiations between very different political constituencies that included the Liberal party, the recently demobilised guerrillas of M-19, and Álvaro Gómez's right-wing Movement for National Salvation. Among its progressive features are the special rights afforded to what it designates as black and indigenous communities, offering them relative autonomy within territorial boundaries recognised by the state. These institutional shifts represent a significant break with the history of Colombian constitutionalism. Hitherto, republican appeals to citizenship and

equality before the law helped to legitimise a national ideal of *mestizaje* that denied racism in the name of mixing, while continuing to discriminate not only against Afrocolombian and indigenous Colombians but also dark-skinned mestizos, whose features too clearly betrayed their proximity to the less favoured sources of race mixture. The constitutional protection of property and privilege discriminated against precisely these social identities, overrepresented among the poor. Indeed, the racism that characterises Colombian society is dependent on the reproduction of a particular kind of inequality that continues to stratify the nation in socioracial terms. In this respect, rather than accepting that, as Paschel (2016a, p. 47) puts it, ‘class inequalities were arguably more salient than racial inequalities in the everyday lives of ordinary people’, it should be argued that forms of discrimination based on race and class were mutually reinforcing to the extent that they were impossible to separate, even though neither is reducible to the other. In short, racism and elitism went hand in hand, as they do to this day, and it is this nexus, inherently racist in spite of its ambiguities, that was implicitly rejected by the constitutional recognition of minority rights.

A key aspect of the shift was the constitutional granting of special legal privileges on the basis of bound serialities. The distinction between bound and unbound serialities comes from the work of Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee, who use the notion to distinguish between collective identities that are voluntarily adopted and those that are imposed by others. For Anderson (1998, p. 117), unbound serialities are those forms of collective identity that are open to all, ‘such open-to-the-world plurals as nationalists, anarchists, bureaucrats, and workers’, whereas bound serialities refer to identities whose membership is limited by categories such as race or ethnicity. From this perspective, unbound categories such as citizenship are potentially liberating, whereas bound serialities are understood as backward-looking and fundamentally exclusive, out of step with the universalising vision of a democratic politics. Furthermore, he is suspicious of attempts to divide the social field in this manner, as they allow the state to impose categories that allow it to control and manage populations.

Chatterjee, in contrast, sees bound serialities as a fact of political life – in some respects as *the* fact of political life – as the institutions of the state engage with populations divided into specific demographics. Borrowing a notion of Foucault’s, both Anderson and Chatterjee contrast the universal ideals of democratic politics with governmentality. For his part, Chatterjee (2004, p. 4) identifies ‘a conflict that lies at the heart of modern politics in most of the world’, namely

the opposition between the universal ideal of civic nationalism, based on individual freedoms and equal rights irrespective of distinctions of religion, race, language, or culture, and the particular demands of cultural identity, which call for the differential treatment of particular groups on grounds

of vulnerability or backwardness or historical injustice, or indeed for numerous other reasons.

This opposition, furthermore, 'is symptomatic of the transition that occurred in modern politics [...] from a conception of democratic politics grounded in the idea of popular sovereignty to one in which democratic politics is shaped by governmentality' (p. 4). In a further contrast to Anderson, Chatterjee sees the terrain of governmentality, marked by a specific set of relationships between institutions and 'populations', as the most significant space of popular politics, as opposed to the mechanisms of representative democracy that are the preserve of civil society which, in a return to Marx, he sees as 'the closed association of modern elite groups, sequestered from the wider popular life of the communities, walled up within enclaves of civic freedom and rational law' (p. 4).

As James Clifford (1998, p. 364) notes with regard to Anderson, this binary opposition tends to oversimplify the political field and risks freezing 'a moralized binary', and a similar critique might be made of Chatterjee's inversion of Anderson's position. However, the debate resonates in the Colombian context, not least because it captures something of what is at stake in the development of political identities. The allocation of specific rights to members of certain bound serialities introduced a new level of complexity into the country's politico-judicial structure, envisaged, in the manner described by Chatterjee, as a form of historic reparation. Afrocolombian and indigenous communities were guaranteed some measure of representation in Congress and limited autonomy in the territorially bounded communities recognised by the state. These communities received recognition and a degree of redistribution, while simultaneously being treated as a supplement, a historic remnant best dealt with in isolation. While special measures were envisaged for ethnic communities, a broader emphasis on participation sought to open the political process up to a more engaged citizenry. Thus, both the universalising possibilities invoked by unbound serialities and the dynamics of population classification and management present in their bound counterparts are apparent in the constitution. With regard to the former, the rhetoric of participation has proliferated in dozens of polities around the globe in the last fifty years but it has a specific history in Colombia, where the closed nature of the political system, particularly in the National Front period (1958–74), was frequently invoked by left-wing insurgencies as a justification for taking up arms. The constitutional settlement of 1991, therefore, sought to open up the democratic process, allowing a voice to all in 'the decisions that affect them', as article two proclaims. The constitutional emphasis on participation justified the development in the following years of a myriad of participatory spaces within the Colombian polity. However, these were overwhelmingly devoted to processes of popular consultation at a local level. Expressions of participatory democracy with genuine decisive power, such as participatory budgeting, have

been confined in the main to a few timid experiments in some of the country's major cities.

It is striking, however, that programmes supposedly aimed at all citizens have generally been perceived in terms of bound serialities, though not those outlined in the constitution. Just as 'black' or indigenous populations were regarded as special cases, participatory programmes were targeted at marginalised communities, rather than the population as a whole. The word *comunidad*, so often invoked in these contexts, in practice designates vulnerable, territorially defined communities, whose influence on the national scene has historically been limited. Participation, in other words, has always been aimed at precise populations, identified by the state as victims of historic marginalisation, including, in the Bolivarian idiom, not only Afrocolombians and indigenous communities but 'the poor of all colours'. To borrow Chatterjee's frame of reference, it is one of the two main forms of engagement between the populations and the world of politics (the other being clientelism). Furthermore, the practical experience of participation in Colombia has more to do with governmentality than democracy, as local administrations have incorporated the notion into their practice across a broad range of dependencies. Contrary to the spirit of the constitution, vulnerable communities – often places where Afrocolombian and indigenous-looking people are overrepresented – have found it difficult to turn these relationships into an exercise in engaged citizenship. Instead, participatory programmes have represented a means for institutions to manage the demands and expectations of a categorised and classified population, while simultaneously legitimising their own systems of governance.

Beyond the political and juridical provisions of the new settlement, the promises of inclusion appeared in a fractured and sometimes violent political landscape. Passive revolutions are often accompanied by violence, and Colombia has been no exception. In the post-1991 period, just as land-titling for minority communities was taking place, an alliance between global corporate interests and local clientelistic networks deployed both paramilitary and state violence in order to carry out the greatest agrarian counter-reform in Colombian history. This simultaneously furthered a development model based on extractive industry and the promotion of industrial agribusiness, a process that has been going on throughout the global south. These groups, particularly powerful in the regions, are strongly represented in Congress, and have captured many branches of Colombia's hybrid state (López, 2010). In the words of Machado et al. (2017, p. 1075), the result is

a paradoxical context where on one hand the country's ethnic and cultural diversity are recognised and, on the other, the imposition of an extractive economic model continues to cause displacement and devastating environmental conflicts, forcing communities to constantly defend their territories, rights, *cosmovisiones* [worldviews], and lifeways.

This is the broad political context which frames attempts to understand the place of institutional anti-racism and Afrocolombian activism in the struggle for equality. What, then, is the role of identity politics in the attempt to counter the ongoing top-down transformation of Colombian society? In order to explore this question, I want to consider three specific cases. My involvement with each took place during an extended period of fieldwork in Quibdó, the departmental capital of Chocó, where I was researching the municipal administration's attempts to forge a political alliance with urban communities that were mainly but not exclusively Afrocolombian. During this study of the relationship between the municipality and vulnerable communities in Quibdó's Comuna Dos [Second District], my focus was not the notion of *afrocolombianidad*, nor in fact Afrocolombian rights, but on problems of participation more generally in an urban area where specific differential rights did not apply. In the process, however, I was able to consider the way that ethnicity was constructed in a document outlining the political programme proposed by the local administration, and I will start with a brief discussion of how this document sets out to construct a unified political subject. Following this, I will refer to two specific events, the First Congress of the Pueblo Negro, Afrocolombiano, Palenquero and Raizal, held in Quibdó in August 2013, and the Cumbre Agraria, held in Bogotá in March 2014.

The Quibdó MIA development plan

Quibdó has in many respects been a symbol of poverty and the failure of the central state in its treatment of Afrocolombians. Unlike the rest of the Pacific lowlands, where the littoral is an adjunct of administrative centres located on the other side of the western *cordillera*, Chocó is at least nominally self-governing, having become a department in 1947, and being governed by a local Afrocolombian political class. This has allowed politicians and the media in the metropolitan centres to tap into the racist imaginary by claiming that the problems of the department are the result of local corruption, as if the scandals that periodically rock the rest of the country were mere figments of the imagination. In 2012, however, a new administration took over the running of the municipality, and promised to do politics differently. The programme of new mayor Zulia Mena, whose own political capital had been accrued through a long history of Afrocolombian activism, offered participation for the most marginalised sectors of the population in the construction and execution of a programme that would prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable in a city where over 80 per cent of the population have unsatisfied basic needs. Crowded with refugees from paramilitary offensives in the rest of the department, whose arrival put an increasing burden on already deficient public services, and surrounded by rivers contaminated by illegal gold mining, Quibdó was a challenging political context in which to promote participation.

Intriguingly, however, the new administration was also the first to foreground the identitarian tropes associated with the institutionalisation of a discourse of *afrocolombianidad*.

The Mena administration's development plan, *Quibdó MIA*, articulates a complex and contradictory political subject. Unusually for documents of this sort, it sets out a historical context, noting that centuries of exploitation, impoverishment and lack of opportunity have left the Afrochocoan population in a state of near 'mental incapacity' (Mena, 2012, p. 16), though there is no corresponding reference to the plight of indigenous communities. The cause of this suffering is identified as the 'absentee-extractivist economic model' (p. 16), in the ascendant during the institution of slavery, that expropriates local resources leaving nothing behind. The programme proposes to counter this historical dispossession by turning Quibdó into 'a world capital of biodiversity' (p. 12). At the same time, it promises to end corruption as 'the mechanism for achieving individual and collective interests' (p. 18), and 'diminish the traps of poverty' (p. 13).

The political subject that underpins this plan is the 'MIA' (mestizo, indigenous, Afrocolombian) of the programme's title, referred to at times as a 'multi-ethnic people', a term that foregrounds popular sovereignty while recognising the bound serialities that come into play in a municipality whose rural area includes collectively titled lands administered by Afrocolombian community councils and indigenous *cabildos* [traditional authorities]. Even when referring to the urban area, however, where no such special rights prevail, there is a tension in the document between the desire to produce a unified popular subject and the assertion of ethnic difference, apparent through the use of the word 'imaginary', which at various points in the text stands in for the notion of culture. Thus, the document sees its collective subject 'originating in the acceptance, integration and harmonization of the three existing ethnic imaginaries [...] and their achievements as ethnicities in the unique and logical construction of an idea of development that will make possible the bio-psycho-social wellbeing of the population'. Part of this process is the struggle to 'position eco-values and identity founded on spiritual beliefs as the means for constructing a just, peaceful, harmonious and united society, rich in morality' (pp. 15, 25).

The focus on traditional values in the pursuit of prosperity sounds somewhat in keeping with the 'utopian thinking' researcher-activist Ulrich Oslender (2016, p. 218) regards as necessary in the Pacific region, the more so because his citation of Lefebvre brings to mind the latter's work on the city. Unlike the cases imagined by Oslender, however, the document's invocation of its collective political subject suggests the problems inherent in the institutionalisation of identity politics within the Colombian political scene. In an environment where being *afrocolombiano* rather than mestizo is the norm, it reproduces

the multiculturalism of the constitution by seeking to create a united popular subject, while simultaneously appealing to bound serialities.

The emphasis on cultural identity, however, blurs the distinction between bound and unbound forms of groupness, in the process removing much of the politics from the text. The solution to the problems of the region is presented as lying in the cultural values of its inhabitants. Furthermore, the presentation of the ethnic identity of an emergent collective subject as a political solution in its own right avoids engagement with the contemporary political economy of the department. The brief history of Afrochocoans, with its dependency-theory-infused critique of extractivism, confronts the political economy responsible for the vast inequalities that shape daily life in the department. Yet it also consigns the worst effects of exploitation to the past. The responsibility for the poverty of the department is assigned to the absentee white or mestizo proprietors and landowners of the past, rather than the current mestizo population, regional elites, or even the central government, which the administration claims to represent. Indeed, as far as the future is concerned, the document echoes the discourse of neoliberal competitiveness and comparative advantage that underpins the state-sponsored model of development, with its promises of securing outsourced contracts – ‘*procesos de tercerización, de off shore, de maquila*’ [processes of sub-contracting, off-shoring and assembly-line production] (Mena, 2012, p. 57). This aside, the commodification of the environment and the attitudes to it of local communities is presented as the only hope for a better life, a decidedly forlorn one at that, given the administration’s 19th-century obsession with the ‘locomotives of progress’. For all the talk of poverty, injustice and corruption, the document exemplifies how ethnic identity politics can be absorbed within institutional structures in ways that remain perfectly functional to Colombia’s ongoing passive revolution. The invocation of identity politics in this context, therefore, serves to legitimise the goals of a particular set of political entrepreneurs rather than express the demands of a social movement. Some community organisers saw it as a kind of political ventriloquism, in which the architects of *Quibdó MIA* simultaneously interpellated the population and claimed to speak for it. In the parts of the city where we worked there was little appetite for identitarian discourse as a mobilising factor, partly because to claim *afrocolombianidad* or indigeneity brought no special benefits in the urban setting, but also because so little was offered in practical terms.

The First Congress of the Pueblo Negro

The complexities surrounding the constitution of a political subject were apparent on a larger stage in the Primer Congreso Nacional del Pueblo Negro, Afrocolombiano, Palenquero y Raizal in 2013, an event partly scheduled to take stock of the impact of law 70, 20 years after its implementation. The

activists of the organising committee were well aware of the pitfalls involved in the attempt to construct a specifically Afrocolombian political subject, capable of setting a collective agenda, mobilising support, and applying pressure on the state to achieve its goals. The division between bound and unbound serialities once again provides insights into the challenges they faced. The cumbersome title of the congress is suggestive of what is at stake in the struggles over naming that have taken place within Afrocolombian social movements. The key concept is that of the people, introducing the idea of popular sovereignty, but this universal political subject is immediately bound, first by the term '*negro*' [black], and then by '*afrocolombiano*'. The first of these might be taken as a simple reference to phenotype but it is in fact a highly loaded term, steeped in the long history of racism in Colombia. The tension between the two terms is in part a result of the disagreement between those who reject '*negro*' as irredeemably derogatory and therefore racist and those who see it as an expression of identity that can be reclaimed from its discriminatory connotations. The former prefer to emphasise the importance of shared ancestry through the use of the term '*afrocolombiano*', presented as the key factor in the definition of this collective subject. As the National Conference of Afrocolombian Organisations (CNOA, n.d.) puts it, 'we consider the Afrocolombian people to be constituted by women and men descended from Africans born in Colombia'.

This nomenclature too is tied to the ways in which the state has allotted specific rights to officially recognised ethnic groups. Thus, to self-identify as *negro* can be either a generic or a highly specific act. It is the term the mestizo majority imposes on people with a particular phenotype throughout the country, but it is also a common form of self-identification among Afrocolombians. Most people in Quibdó, for example, identify as *negro*. On the other hand, when hitched to the territorially defined notion of 'community', *negro* is a constitutionally recognised ethnicity affording specific rights. As a result of demands from activists, both *palenqueros*, descendants of a small but culturally significant maroon community not far from Cartagena, and *raizales*, speakers of an English-based creole in the Caribbean islands of San Andrés and Providencia, are identities recognised by legislation (specifically article 310 of the constitution for *raizales*; decree 4181 of 2007 and decree 2163 of 2012 for both *raizales* and *palenqueros*). Unlike the generic notion of blackness, which could be applied to or be claimed by any black citizen without affording any particular rights, each is both culturally and territorially bound. Both *negro* and *afrocolombiano* can be applied to these groups, though the latter's identification with the English-speaking Caribbean makes the nationalising aspect of the word *afrocolombiano* problematic. The deliberate use of each of these terms, then, was a highly politicised choice, simultaneously recognising the heterogeneity of blackness within Colombia, declaring unity within difference, and advancing political claims within the juridical framework of the state.

The Congress was envisaged as a space in which Afrocolombian organisations would refine their goals and clarify their dealings with the state. In fact, some *quibdosenos* suggested that this was a gathering of all those who position themselves as interlocutors of the state, as representatives and community leaders, to be sure, but above all as brokers. As in the case of *Quibdó MIA*, some people felt that these actors appropriated the voice of the black or Afrocolombian population, excluding absent perspectives, in the pursuit of personal advancement. This was in many ways an unfair claim because alongside the traffickers of influence were many activists with a long trajectory in the struggle for Afrocolombian rights. If things had been otherwise, the event would never have taken place, as the process of canvassing opinion, compiling the agenda, and organising transport and accommodation was dependent on a reservoir of good will.

At the same time, this critique recognised both the partially co-opted nature of these spaces, and the lack of participation of most of the community, a problem not exclusive to ethnic minorities. It also reminds us, as Paschel (2016a, p.3) notes, that while Afrocolombian organisations in Colombia ‘were essential to the making of black political subjects’ they were ‘small and under-resourced networks of activists [...] with few political allies, unpopular with, and largely unknown to, the masses’. Grass-roots scepticism about the movement – echoed by activists who occasionally wondered whether it made sense to talk about a movement – was clear in a sarcastic remark made by a Quibdó woman: ‘I hear they brought a thousand *negros* to Quibdó for this Congress – why did they do that when there are already plenty of *negros* here?’ The provocative use of the word *negro* questions activists’ insistence on the political significance of particular forms of nomenclature. Redolent of the commonly held scepticism about ‘politics’ in Colombia, such attitudes play a key role in discouraging activism and political mobilisation. In the particular case of Afrocolombians, they are indicative of the relative weakness of identity politics on the national scale, especially when the obvious incentives to mobilise around identity are missing. This was particularly true of attempts to foreground urban issues such as racism in large cities with mestizo majorities. In these contexts, Afrocolombians might be identified as needing representation, but the bound seriality of *afrocolombianidad* brings with it no specific rights. Furthermore, from the perspective of Quibdó’s poorest *barrios*, even struggles against racism had little immediate bearing on the lived experience of communities struggling for jobs and basic public services in a city where the administration itself was Afrocolombian.

The division between different actors struggling for Afrocolombian rights is partly due to the relationships constructed through constitutional legislation. As Bolívar (2004, p. 17) notes, law 70 did little to establish the mechanisms through which Afrocolombian community councils, the organisations exercising jurisdiction over collectively titled lands, could interact with each

other and with regional society, framing them instead as interlocutors of the state. The need to build a cohesive movement was frequently mentioned in the Congress. Tensions between activists, however, came to the surface very quickly. After the fanfare surrounding the presidential visit, the following day's opening of the Congress for business was a tumultuous affair. Following ritual invocations of spiritual and ancestral forces, the start to proceedings was delayed by an hour as a delegation from Valle, dominated by powerful regional broker Rosa Solís, approached the stage, arguing loudly about the order of proceedings, and haranguing the rest of the auditorium. Solís has been an influential figure in establishing more than 20 community councils in the wake of law 70, and part of a high-level consultancy group with Afrocolombian communities set up by the Uribe administration, a group later dissolved by order of the constitutional court. A controversial figure, Solís is seen by many as the quintessential example of the broker who has made both a name and a living as a trusted interlocutor of the state (La Silla Vacía, 2012).

Similar scenes were repeated on the final day, and were seen by the organisers as humiliating for the movement as a whole, and the general conclusions drawn up by the CNOA underline the negative effects of competition for influence within their organisations, often referred to as the desire for 'protagonism'. Under the 'lessons learned' section of the Congress proceedings, the first three examples of negative practice were 'the institutionalisation of the movement through the strategy of divide and corrupt', 'the projection of an image of organisational chaos which the State takes advantage of to ignore its obligations to the black people', and the fact that 'the *negro, afrocolombiano, raizal* and *palestino* social movement has no presence in decision-making spaces' (Vivanco and Ramírez, 2014, p. 9). The final point underlined the key problem that, as elsewhere in participatory spaces in Colombia, community engagement was limited to processes of consultation.

In the case of ethnic communities, however, the legal requirement for consultation represented a form of leverage. The question of how to engage with the state hinged on a single practical point, the controversial topic of *consulta previa* [prior consultation]. This legal figure, adapted from the International Labour Organisation's convention 169 (1989), was a fundamental feature of legislation surrounding the granting of land title, and the main gift of the new legislative framework to officially recognised minorities. In effect, it means that development affecting collectively held lands has to receive the informed consent of the communities concerned before going ahead. What should be a political trump card, however, has constantly been undermined through a wide range of dubious practices, from official denial of the existence of ethnic communities in specific territories to badly managed and unrepresentative processes which have rubber-stamped projects with powerful backers in the private or public sector. The Congress therefore aimed to produce a set of protocols protecting community rights. Furthermore, it was agreed from the

outset of the Congress that the list of demands emerging from each of the thematic committees was to carry a warning at the top of the page noting that the deliberations of these committees were not to be regarded as an exercise in prior consultation. From this perspective, the Congress was characterised by the failure of the administration's strategy of flattering the Afrocolombian movement for its political significance, while seeking an accommodation that would allow it to pursue both its goal of disarming the FARC and furthering its development goals.

For activists, the Congress offered an opportunity to build a more united movement. In many respects, the rhetoric of solidarity covered up a movement dogged by infighting over which sectors, and even which leaders, should be regarded as proper interlocutors of the state. In particular, the collective recognition of the movement's own relative weakness led to a simple recommendation on the need for solidarity: 'we need to make statements in favour of other social and communitarian movements, because alone we will get nowhere' (Vivanco and Ramírez, 2014, p. 9). There is a clear recognition that identity politics alone cannot produce a political subject capable of challenging the deepening of Colombia's passive revolution, a process that more than any other threatens the life opportunities of Afrocolombians.

The Cumbre Agraria of 2014

It is precisely this appreciation that led to the participation of ethnic activists in the Cumbre Agraria, Campesina, Étnica y Popular (the agrarian, peasant, ethnic and popular summit) of 2014. In fact, while the Congress was taking place, Colombia was in an almost unprecedented state of turmoil. The free trade agreement with the US that had come into law in 2012 forced agricultural workers to buy US seeds and pay exorbitant prices for fertiliser. In a desperate response, peasant organisations, including members of indigenous and Afrocolombian communities, blocked major roads in 25 of the country's 31 departments, bringing the heavy goods haulage that is the lifeblood of Colombian commerce to a grinding halt. President Santos' unfortunate declaration that 'there is no such agrarian strike' was belied by blocked highways, as the strikers were joined by hauliers protesting at fuel prices. Daily images of the activists' confrontations across blazing barricades with the notorious Colombian riot police made news bulletins across the country, garnering unprecedented support for their cause among the urban population. Even the private media channels, generally hostile to social protest, toned down their coverage and presented the strikers in a neutral and at times even positive light. For a while, this nascent movement represented the most obvious threat to the dominant model of development.

In the face of the government's failure to respond to the strikers' demands, a meeting of the Cumbre was scheduled to take place in Bogotá in March,

2014. A huge organisational effort brought more than 30,000 delegates to the Coldeportes coliseum over a rainy March weekend in Bogotá. Here, too, the agglutinative title of the event is striking. Clearly aimed at the creation of a rural popular front seeking to articulate distinct demands in order to create a single, more powerful political actor, such an attempt was particularly significant because in the years after 1991 peasant leaders were concerned that the ethnicisation of collective land-titling had left mestizo peasants and colonists on the agricultural frontier in limbo. Indeed, as Duarte (2015, p. 450) notes, one of the effects of the constitution and its attendant ethnic legislation was that the mestizo peasant became 'the bearer of third class rural citizenship compared to the ethnic populations'. And as Bolívar (2004, p. 219) notes in her comments on Sotomayor's work in the 90s in Silvia, Cauca, 'the process of constructing a cultural identity and redefining themselves as indigenous has led to a cultural "invisibility" of the peasant which [...] could be useful to the government in neutralizing peasant struggle'.

Indeed, whereas indigenous and Afrocolombian groups tended to be presented as guardians of the environment, mestizo colonists were more likely to be framed as destructive *raspachines* [coca growers] and guerrilla sympathisers. However, the legal scaffolding established by the constitution, with its offer of rights on the basis of bound seriality, led peasants to seek recognition as a collective subject in similar terms, with the legislation on the establishment of peasant reserve zones being passed a year after law 70. It is significant that an element of these claims is the desire to protect peasant culture, with the National Association for Peasant Reserve Zones emphasising the importance of 'positioning our cultural identity' and ensuring 'the survival of our cultural identity' (Prensa Rural, 2014). This is in itself a hint that the state's recognition of the bound serialities of ethnic minorities has been noted by other groups seeking political recognition. It is also a reaction against the increased visibility of ethnic communities with a recognised cultural identity, and peasant communities whose cultural distinctiveness was ignored. As Bolívar rightly suggests, post-1991 legislation 'inverted the differences, the negative representations, and the lack of connection between those groups that could be identified as culturally distinct, and the poor mestizos, now devoid of support and protection' (Bolívar, 2004, p. 220). Thus, as Montenegro (2016, p. 175) notes, 'it is not the same to struggle for a piece of land as it is to exercise territoriality, understood as the establishment of economic, political and cultural relationships in the territory, as well as territorial forms of ordering and government'. Furthermore, whereas the state has seen peasant reserve zones as areas in which it can strengthen its presence, for the peasant movement the political autonomy of the ethnic communities represents a model. Montenegro (p. 176) cites Robert Daza, then president of the National Agrarian Coordinating Committee (Coordinador Agrario Nacional), who claimed that 'while the historic struggle of the peasantry has been for land the scenario of

struggle has recently been extended to the defence of and the right to territory'. For his part, Andrés Gil, representative of Marcha Patriótica, was even clearer in his declaration that 'we don't just want land, we want territoriality to carry out an exercise in self-government' (Telesur, 2014). These demands, with their denunciation of the multiple threats posed by state promoted megaprojects, extractive industry, and agro-industrial monocultures such as oil palm and bananas, represent a direct threat to the dominant development model.

Competition between the different ethnic and peasant movements debilitates all of them in the face of global capital's assault on the Colombian countryside. Thus, the presence of the Black Communities' Process (PCN), an organisation that has played a key role in struggles of Afrocolombian rights in the southern part of the Pacific littoral, and the National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia (ONIC) at the summit was a significant strategic departure. This was the first time that a unified list of demands had been presented to the state by such a broad range of organisations. At this moment of solidarity, however, another concern weighed on the minds of delegates. If the Congreso Afrocolombiano had focused on prior consultation and its relationship to the state, the Cumbre was haunted by the peace negotiations in Havana, and the widely shared sense that the movement's demands were not being represented. The constant demand for 'peace with social justice', repeated in committee after committee like a political incantation, suggested a deep anxiety about the post-agreement world. Given that radical structural reforms likely to challenge privilege were absent from the agreements, social justice still had to be fought for.

Though it would be naive to imagine that the social movements involved in these struggles had no channels of communication with the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the relationship was more problematic in the case of ethnic organisations. The notion that the guerrilla groups have always existed in a predatory relationship with traditional authorities is an exaggeration, increasingly apparent in the wake of the FARC's disarmament, as extractive industry and logging have gone into overdrive in the power vacuum left by the insurgents. Even so, if the peasant movement felt marginalised by its lack of constitutional recognition, ethnic movements have long had a fraught relationship with the armed left and, indeed, with the left in general, which tended to deny the specificity of ethnic struggles not only by focusing strongly on class but by unreflectingly repeating the nostrums of nation-building *mestizaje* (Arocha, 1998; Bolívar, 2004, p. 220). In recent times, the presence of armed actors in collectively held ethnic territories has had an ambiguous effect, at best.

If any more proof were needed, the negotiations in Havana, haggling over the details of the insurgency's defeat, were taking place without the participation of ethnic communities. This absence was also a significant indicator of the priorities adopted by the Santos administration. At the 2013

Congress, the Afrocolombian movement established a body, the *Autoridad Nacional Afrocolombiana* [National Afrocolombian Authority], precisely in order to establish a channel of communication with the negotiators in Havana. These efforts were initially ignored or rebuffed and the ethnic chapter of the Havana peace accords of 2016, currently being discussed by communities across Colombia, was very much an afterthought. It was only 12 hours before the presentation of the final document that an addition to the sixth chapter of the agreement was approved, establishing an 'ethnic focus' (similar to the 'gender focus' that runs throughout the document) during the implementation of the accords, essentially a recognition by both the state and the insurgency that the rights associated with ethnic difference would be respected in the post-accord world. What is striking in this case is that ethnic identity politics should be so low on the agenda for both the state and the FARC.

In spite of these doubts, the march from the coliseum to the symbolic seat of national government in the Plaza Bolívar was an expression of a utopian dreaming, not least because of the crowds warmly applauding the march. Briefly, it was as if the Uribe years, marked by what Eduardo Restrepo (personal communication, 2004) once described as the 'paramilitarisation of the Colombian mentality', no longer had any purchase on the imagination. Writing two years after the Cumbre, José Santos of the PCN (2016, p. 88) argued for a utopian solution to the national conflict 'through the construction of an intercultural territory, which respects the territorial structures of each of the peoples, united in a single entity. All under the same umbrella, which we could call the United Interethnic Territory of Colombia'. This dream, however, is unlikely to be realised. As Santos's text was being published, the leadership committee wrote to the president of the republic, denouncing 'the systematic strategy of delay and attrition [...] on the part of the government's delegation', and the fact that 'there are no effective results that demonstrate your government's supposed political will to peace' (*Desde Abajo*, 2016). Worse still, the social movements proposing an alternative vision to the model were paying a high price. In March 2017, delegates of the Cumbre occupied the buildings of the Ministry of the Interior to protest at the murder of activists in the peasant, Afrocolombian and indigenous movements. By their own reckoning, 120 had been killed in just over 14 months. This particular struggle against the model is being lost in a bloody fashion, and at the time of writing there is no end in sight for the violence. As a result, Colombia's passive revolution shows no sign of being challenged in the short term.

Conclusion

The official promotion of identity politics in Colombia contains a fundamentally contradictory idea, namely that the inclusion of Afrocolombians and indigenous groups is possible without a radical restructuring of the distribution of wealth

and power. Indeed, the very notion of inclusion becomes untenable, as in order to be able to contemplate an end to racism and the elitism that goes with it, the very entity comprising these groups would have to be transformed into something radically different. The granting of rights on the basis of bound serialities, whether these are based on race, ethnicity, territory, or a mixture of all three, apparently engages with indigenous and black Colombians while banishing them to the margins, to places where they are out of sight and out of mind for the urban majority. Yet these groups are not safe, even where they 'belong', because those territories that were deemed *baldíos* [public lands], empty and unclaimed, turned out to be places that dominant groups had plans for after all.

Needless to say, the public expressions of anti-racism found so frequently in the media are never linked to this perspective. It is not uncommon for the news bulletins to include a three-minute news item on an Afrocolombian woman being denied service in a bar, while the murder of representatives of black and indigenous communities goes unremarked. The most that can be expected is that such occurrences are reported on as random events, inexplicable tragedies, as resistant to explanation as a hurricane or an earthquake. There are, it seems, acceptable and unacceptable forms of identity politics, and those that seek common cause with others in the struggle against Colombia's entrenched inequality are too challenging to be allowed a voice within a national conversation managed by Bogotá-based media companies, owned by the conglomerates that drive economic policy.

Gramscian perspectives are often praised for their subtlety. In this study, however, I have used the notion of passive revolution bluntly, partly to provoke and partly to underline the gravity of the present conjuncture. Of course, as Restrepo (2013, p. 15) notes, the state is not a monolithic entity against which all struggle can be measured, something that a detailed Gramscian analysis would emphasise. The same can be said for neoliberalism. And, as Oslender (2016) and others have shown convincingly, people do find spaces for struggle, even within the neoliberal horizon, winning breathing spaces and small victories for their communities. But Gramsci's work reminds us that 'in its contradictory structure, [the state] condenses a variety of different relations and practices into a definite "system of rule"' (Hall, 1986, p. 18). Identity politics is part of this regime and tends to be functional to it, as much by accident as by design. Gramsci's thinking underlines that all hegemonic projects have their day, but his emphasis on the need to apply an unshrinking 'pessimism of the intellect' to political analysis warns against an excessive faith in emancipatory processes. With this in mind, the notion of passive revolution reminds us that the struggle against entrenched privilege in a country as unequal as Colombia is likely to be long and difficult. Local elites have historically proved adept at reshaping institutional arrangements in their favour and the current conjuncture suggests that social movements will continue to face very testing times in the years to come.

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